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Review

Instruments for Measuring Service Quality in Sport and Physical Activity Services

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A B S T R A C T

Studies that conceptualize and measure quality in sport services date back to the last two decades. The present study aims to examine quality in sport services in terms of the classification of participant services and spectator services and to provide a summary of the empirical studies carried out to date. This study demonstrates that sport services literature is still in its infancy and no agreement exists on the developed models. Furthermore, the research models examined indicate that sports services not only possess different attributes and dimensions than other service industries but also differ in themselves. Consequently, the produced models need to be tested in the future on different sample groups for further clarification.

Key words: *instruments, service quality, participant service, spectator service, sports*

Introduction

Today, health problems in individuals are on the rise due to lack of exercise and physical activities[1], as machines perform most of the work, which make bodily activities individually important. On the other hand, through sporting events, a large mass of people are engaged with sports directly or indirectly, either by actively performing or by watching sports. In general, sports help individuals maintain their physical and mental health and become a source of pleasure and entertainment through games[2]. Undergoing a rapid process of industrialization from the mid-twentieth century onwards[3], sports have diversified in form and purpose with this process, assuming its most modern form at present. Therefore, its prominent place in social life both in terms of participation and game attendance has made sports a broad market[4]. Offered to customers in a broad range by numerous profit-making or non-profit organizations, sports services as a significant economic industry affect individuals directly or indirectly in physiological, psychological, sociological and economical terms[2]. In developed countries, in particular, sports services have a prominent place in service economy[5,6].

Chelladurai[7,8] categorizes sports services under two groups: participant services and spectator services. Participant services can be exemplified by the services offered by recreation and fitness centers, while services concerning a sports game played in a stadium (i.e., football) or a multi-sport event (i.e., olympic games) fall under the category of spectator services. An insight into sport services and their categorization will facilitate dealing with the instruments and models used for these services.

Researchers dealing with sport management and sport marketing have recently begun to conceptualize and measure service quality[9,10]. Various studies have been conducted on the quality of sport services in the last two decades. The present study aims to examine quality in sport services in terms of the classification of participant services and spectator services and to provide a summary of the empirical studies carried out to date. To this end, the concept of service quality was first addressed and then, a summary of the service quality models for sport services was thematically examined.

Service quality

Service is defined as an activity or benefit that one party offers to another that does not result in the ownership of anything[11,12]. As suggested by Lovelock[13], service is an act or performance offered by one party to another. According to these definitions, services are intangible and may be produced by people and/or machines. Service

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has four characteristics: intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability[14]. With these characteristics, service quality is regarded as an ambiguous and complex concept to be understood, applied, and controlled as it does not contain many tangible qualities[15]. There is no accepted consensus regarding a single definition of service quality[16]; however, the most common definition is the degree to which the service meets customer expectations and needs[17–20].

There have been many attempts to gain an insight into service quality. Grönroos[21] notes two significant dimensions that affect the total quality of a service, which are *technical quality* and *functional quality*. In the framework of these dimensions, the quality of a service provided is measured as a result of an evaluation process, in which consumer expectation and perception is compared. Lehtinen and Lehtinen define three quality dimensions: *physical quality*, which involves the physical aspect of a service (facilities or equipment); *corporate quality,* which involve image and profile; and *interactive quality*, which involves the interaction between contact personnel and customers and interaction between customers[14]. Here, a basic argument is that service quality is a product of the interaction between service components producing the service and customers. Rust and Oliver[22] offer three quality dimensions: the service product (i.e., technical quality), service delivery (i.e., functional quality), and service environment. Brady and Cronin[23] also use three quality dimensions: interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality.

Most studies on service quality carried out in the last two decades have been based on the SERVQUAL model. Dealing with the concept of service quality from a broader perspective, Parasuraman et al.[14] developed this model to measure service quality. Parasuraman et al.[14] initially focused on ten dimensions of service quality and later reduced the number of these dimensions to five: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry[24] underlined the differences between customer and corporate perceptions with regard to the service quality provided in the framework of these dimensions and examining these differences, they argued that service quality (SQ=P–E) can be determined by measuring the differences between what a customer perceives that s/he received (P) and what a s/he expects (E). If $P > E$, service quality is high, and $P < E$ is evaluated as indicating low service quality. Despite its wide use[25] and popularity[26,27], the SERVQUAL model has also been a target of serious criticisms[28–33]. One of the most significant of these criticisms claims that five dimensions of SERVQUAL are inadequate for generalization[31] and thus, it fails to properly represent some service industries[28,30,34].

The most striking of these criticisms is that of Cronin and Taylor[32,35]. Suggesting that the gap theory is lacking in empirical quality and has not been supported by much theoretical evidence and that measuring »expectations« is inappropriate, Cronin and Taylor[35] developed a »performance-based« service quality instrument called SERVPERF. Based on the five dimensions of SERVQUAL, SERVPERF only measures customer perceptions. Discussions on SERVQUAL *versus* SERVPERF later continued by more evidence offered by the two groups of researchers to support their own approaches[35,36]. As it only measures customer perceptions, SERVPERF has received support from various researchers as a practical model that is easy to implement[28]. Despite the differences between the two instruments, researchers have so far used both models. Nevertheless, there is no agreement on which model is more universally appropriate and thus, it is up to the researcher to choose the most appropriate model.

Service quality models in sport services

Arguably, by the nature of service industries, the attributes and specific dimensions they involve may differ from one industry to another[28,37]. There are many studies confirming specific service attributes and dimensions[25,38]. Among them, studies on sport services with specific characteristics assume a prominent role. With regard to sport services under the two broad categories of »spectator services« and »participant services«[7,8], researchers dealing with sport management and marketing have recently begun to conceptualize and measure service quality[39]. Below are some examples of the studies on sport services that deal with our subject of study.

Service quality models in spectator sports

Focusing on the physical servicescape in a stadium within the scope of spectator sports in their studies, Wakefield and Sloan[40] and Wakefield, Blodgett, and Sloan[41] found that spectator participation is affected by the quality of the servicescape in a stadium where a game is played. Aspects of servicescape in a stadium include facility parking**,** facility aesthetics, scoreboard, seating comfort, layout accessibility, space allocation, and signage. The authors suggest that these dimensions are not related to the sporting event, which is the core service. Components of servicescape add value to the sporting event. This scale developed has no dimension towards sporting event since it mostly focuses on physical environments.

McDonald, Sutton and Milne[42] developed TEAMQUAL, a 39-item instrument to measure service quality in professional team sports based on the dimensions of SERVQUAL. The authors grounded their study in the difference between customer expectations and customer perceptions. This difference becomes the source of quality judgements. Although the scale is based on SERVQUL dimensions, the items involved are associated with spectator sports.

In their study, Theodorakis and Kambitsis[43] introduced the following six dimensions of quality in spectator services: satisfaction, access, responsiveness, reliability, security and tangibles. Gencer[44] developed another instrument for spectator sports that measures service quality in football stadiums and consists of 47 items and three dimensions, which are core service quality, interac-

tion quality, and physical environment quality. The author suggests that not only core service quality, but also the improvement of interaction quality and physical environment quality should be focused on for complete improvement of perceived service quality.

In a study on college basketball, Kelley and Turley[45] developed a service quality model that contains nine factors they obtained from an exploratory factor analysis on 35 service attributes. This study consists of nine dimensions, which are employees, price, facility access, concessions, fan comfort, game experience, show time, convenience, and smoking. According to the results obtained from the study, »game exhibited« and »game result« are two determinants of the quality or spectator satisfaction. Theodorakis, Kambitis, Laios, and Koustelios[46] conducted a similar study on professional basketball. The 22--item instrument called SPORTSERV consists of five dimensions: tangibles, responsiveness, access, security, reliability. Subsequently, Theodorakis and Alexandris[47] provided evidence for the validity and reliability of the instrument by carrying out a study on service quality in professional football using the SPORTSERV instrument. Both scales mentioned herein involve all service quality dimensions.

Kuenzel and Yassim[48] examined the influence of experience of the game on satisfaction, word-of-mouth and intention to attend. For this research one distinct emotional experience, joy of cricket spectators, was investigated. The findings from the study indicated that social facilitation, quality of game and auditory are dimensions of spectator joy. The authors suggested that distinct emotions and their consequences need greater attention from researchers and managers.

Table 1 summarizes the constructs of service quality models developed for spectator sports by the abovementioned studies.

Service quality models in participant sports

Various studies have been conducted on sport services by using the SERVQUAL model. MacKay and Crom-

TABLE 1
CONSTRUCTS OF SERVICE QUALITY MODELS IN SPECTATOR SPORTS

Model	Factor	Construct		
		Staff	Program	Facility
Kuenzel and Yassim, 2007	3	Quality of game		Social facilitation Auditory
Gencer, 2005	3	Interaction quality	Core service quality	Physical environment quality
Theodorakis, Kambitis, Laios, and Koustelios, 2001 SPORTSERV	5	Responsiveness Reliability		Tangibles Access Security
Kelley and Turley, 2001	9	Employees		Price Facility access Concessions Fan comfort Game experience Show time Convenience Smoking
Theodorakis and Kambitsis, 1998	6	Responsiveness Reliability		Tangibles Access Security Satisfaction
Wakefield, Blodgett, and Sloan, 1996	7			Facility parking Facility aesthetics Scoreboard, Seating comfort Layout accessibility Space allocation Signage
McDonald, Sutton ve Milne, 1995 TEAMQUAL	5	Reliability Responsiveness Assurance Empathy		Tangibles

pton[49] used the five dimensions of SERVQUAL to measure recreation service quality in line with consumer desires and perceptions and developed a 25-item instrument which contains most of the items of these dimensions. Later, Crompton, MacKay, and Fesenmaier[50] examined this model in terms of consistency and found statistical support for only four of the five factors proposed for service quality. These four factors were assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles. Subsequently, using the dimensions of MacKay and Crompton's[49] instrument and SERVQUAL, Wright, Duray, and Goodale[51] proposed a 30-item instrument to evaluate recreation center service quality. Using the SERVQUAL model to assess outdoor recreation services with favorable results, Kouthouris[52] later retested the applicability of SERVQUAL in outdoor services; however, the results of the study did not provide evidence for the value of the SERVQUAL model in one of the segments of the sport tourism industry, and supported previous studies that questioned the universal applicability of SERVQUAL. In general, these studies show that SERQUAL dimensions do not properly comply to the structure of participant sport services.

Relying on literature review and the results of a focus group, Kim and Kim[53] developed a 33-item instrument called Quality Excellence of Sports Centers (QUESC) to assess the service quality of sports centers in South Korea. The items in this instrument have been examined under eleven dimensions: employee attitude, employee reliability, program offered, ambience, information available, personal considerations, price, privilege, ease of mind, stimulation, and convenience. However, three dimensions – price, privilege, and stimulation – of the QUESC has only 1 item. The stability of a single-item dimension would be questionable.

Howat, Absher, Crilley, and Milne[54] developed a five-dimension instrument for the services of sports and leisure centers called CERM-CSQ (Center for Environmental and Recreation Management-Customer Service Quality). This instrument consists of the following dimensions: core services, staff quality, general facility, and secondary services. In this study, however, the content relation of some of the items involved by the factors appears doubtful. *General facility dimension* involves the items such as »safe parking« and »facility cleanliness«, but similar items such as »facility comfort« and »quality installation« are under *core services dimension*. However, the *core service* is the reason of being in the market[55]. Therefore; it consists of the items associated with the *core service* in participant sport services[2].

The perceived service quality aspects were later reduced to three dimensions by Howat, Murray and Crilley[56]: personnel, core, and peripheral. These studies were consistent with the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument.

Han[57] conducted a study on the quality of ski services in private sports centers in South Korea and found that the quality of ski services was affected by the following five dimensions: programmes, employee performance, public relations, cost and facility. A similar study was carried out by Gencer, Demir, and Aycan[58] in a ski resort in Turkey. Based on the findings of the focus group, the 18-item instrument consists of five dimensions, which are ski educators, ski pistes and equipments, hotels and employees, ambience, and entertainment. Nevertheless, the lack of the programme dimension in the latter study is striking and could be considered as a shortcoming.

Investigating whether the SERVQUAL dimensions can be used to evaluate the service quality in athletic camps, Costa, Tsitskari, Tzetzis, and Goudas[59] concluded that camp quality consisted of the dimensions of training programme, contentment-intention, safety and convenience in the facilities, tangibles and relations with the coaches. According to this study, while the children evaluate the quality of a camp with regard to five dimensions, the parents evaluate participation of their children to a sport camp with regard to four dimensions (accommodation installations, coaches, contentment-intention and access-communication).

Ko and Pastore[60] tested a conceptual service quality model (SSQRS) in recreational sports and demonstrated results that confirm the multidimensionality of the concept of service quality. In the proposed model, service quality consists of four general dimensions: program quality (range of program, operating time, and information), interaction quality (client-employee interaction and inter-client interaction), outcome quality (physical change, valence, and sociability), and environment quality (ambient condition, design, and equipment). As the authors suggest, the results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the SSQRS was psychometrically sound and furthermore, the hierarchical framework suggested was appropriate. More recently, Ko and Pastore[61] reused the SSQRS in the context of campus recreational sports and confirmed the four dimensions of the instrument.

Various studies have recently been conducted on fitness services, which have a prominent place in participatory sport services. The first instrument aiming to gain an insight into the characteristics of fitness services is the SAFS (Scale of Attributes of Fitness Services) developed by Chelladurai, Scott, and Haywood-Farmer[62]. This instrument has five dimensions, which are professional, consumer, peripheral, facilitating goods, and goods and services. The first four dimensions of SAFS relate to the primary services offered by a fitness club, while the final dimension, goods and services, does not directly concern fitness[63]. Later, in their study on the fitness centers in Greece, Papadimitriou and Karteroliotis[64] presented a structure with four dimensions, which are instructor quality, facility attraction and operation, program availability and delivery, and other services. A subsequent study on fitness services was performed by Chang and Chelladurai[65]. The SQFS (Scale of Quality in Fitness Services) instrument developed by the authors consists of the following nine dimensions: interpersonal interactions, task interactions, programs, service climate, management commitment to service quality, physical environments, other clients, service failures/recovery, and perceived service quality. The instrument developed in

this study can be usefully employed in other contexts of sports and fitness services.

One of the more recent instruments designed to evaluate the service quality of health and fitness clubs is the SQAS (Service Quality Assessment Scale) developed by Lam et al.[63]. This instrument includes 31 items and six dimensions, which are staff, program, locker room, physical facility, workout facility, and child care. The results of the study demonstrated that the SQAS has sound psychometrical qualities and can be used to evaluate the service quality of health-fitness clubs. Nevertheless, the authors note that the model they proposed is in its infancy and suggest other researchers to review the SQAS by using other samples. As a matter of fact, Gurbuz, Kocak, and Lam[66] applied this instrument to the fitness centers in Turkey and concluded that all the subdimensions in the original instrument applied to their study and exhibited high values of validity and reliability.

Another study on the service quality of health and fitness centers was conducted by Dhurup, Singh, and Surujlal[67] in South Africa. This instrument consists of 39 items and nine dimensions, which are personnel, programming and medical, convenience and information, dissemination, functionality and layout, ambience and accessibility, facility attraction, safety and support, membership. The human interaction dimensions (personnel) emerged as the most pertinent in health and fitness service quality evaluation.

The most recent study designed to evaluate the service quality of health-fitness industry was carried out by Lagrosen and Lagrosen[68]. In their study on the service quality of Swedish health-fitness industry that used in-depth interviews and observation technique, the authors identified the quality dimensions as pleasure, mental change, and physical change. These dimensions indicate the effects on participants. The main enablers are defined as »relational competence« and »technical competence«. The framework presented in this research is useful for managers of fitness companies when designing and managing their activities.

The common point of above studies was to identify models to evaluate various aspects of the quality of participant sport services. In these studies, however, it cannot be said that there is a complete compromise in terms of dimensions suggested. The structures of service quality models developed for participant sports are summarized in Table 2.

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of the present article was to examine quality in sport services and to present a summary of the empirical studies carried out to date. To this end, quality in sport services was examined under the categories of participant services and spectator services.

In so far as services differ in several critical characteristics and have been classified by different criteria, the strategies for managing and marketing of different forms of service should also vary. By the same token, it would be necessary to identify those dimensions of quality specific to a given form of service[65]. As seen in the exemplary studies addressed by this study, the services offered by sport industry are different from those offered by other service industries[69]. One of the most significant attributes of participatory sport services with certain specific characteristics is the program dimension and for instance, SERVQUAL does not contain the program dimension[63]. The idea that the five dimensions of SERVQUAL and the items and meanings they represent may vary depending on the service structure[70] is evident in sport services. As a comprehensive and general instrument designed for service quality in various businesses and industries, the dimensions of SERVQUAL cannot provide specific information to explain the quality of spectator and participatory sport services. Although there were initially some studies on sport services that used SERVQUAL and its modifications[42,49], subsequent studies concluded that these dimensions were not very appropriate for sport services[52,59]. As a result, most researchers have attempted to design alternative instruments that could be used in quality evaluations of sport services and thus, different instruments have been developed in accordance with the type and structure of sport services. This confirms the argument that service attributes and quality dimensions tend to vary with different types of service[28,31]. To sum up, it is clear that SERVQUAL is not a very appropriate instrument for sport services.

On the other hand, an examination of the research contained in this study from a management perspective gains insight into what customers expect from sport services and what matters for them in terms of quality. Therefore, this information points out to the direction to be followed by management in their investment of efforts and resources to increase the probability of positive gains from sports customers.

Consequently, this study demonstrates that the literature on the quality of sport services is still in its infancy. Furthermore, general service models and the quality models on sport services produced by researchers are multidimensional and there is no agreed model among them. The studies conducted to date cannot be generalized as they used limited samples. Therefore, authors encourage other researchers to carry out similar studies to increase generalizability. Therefore, models presented by the studies conducted to date need to be tested on different sample groups in the future for further clarification.

In the future studies, the quality models developed for sport services should be tested on more examples. Thus, it may be revealed whether the models are generalizable or not. Also, these models should be tested in different societies and intercultural comparisons should be made. Only by this way it can be understood whether the models show universal characteristics.

TABLE 2
CONSTRUCTS OF SERVICE QUALITY MODELS IN PARTICIPANT SPORTS

Model	Factor	Consturct		
		Staff	Program	Facility
Gencer, Demir, and Aycan, 2008	5	Ski educators		Ski pistes and equipments Hotels and employees Ambience Entertaintment
Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2007	5	Relational competence	Technical competence	Pleasure Mental change Physical change
Dhurup, Singh, and Surujlal, 2006	9	Personnel	Programming and medical	Convenience and information Dissemination Functionality and layout Ambience and accessibility Facility attraction Safety and support Membership
Ko and Pastore, 2005 SSQRS	4	Interaction quality	Program quality	Outcome quality Environment quality
Lam, Zhang, and Jensen, 2005 SQAS	6	Staff	Program Child care	Locker room Physical facility Workout facility
Costa, Tsitskari, Tzetzis, and Goudas, 2004	5	Relations (with the coaches)	Training program	Tangibles Safety and convenience (in the facilities) Contentment-intention
Chang and Chelladurai, 2003 SQFS	9	Interpersonal interactions Task interactions	Programs	Service climate Management commitment to service quality Physical environments Other clients Service failures/recovery Perceived service qualty
Papadimitriou and Karteroliotis, 2000	4	Instructor quality	Program availability and delivery	Facility attraction and operation Other services
Han, 1999	4	Employee performance	Programs	Public relations Cost and facility
Howat, Absher, Crilley, and Milne, 1996 CERM-CSQ	4	Staff quality	Core services (e.g., activity ranges) Secondary services	General facility Core services (e.g., facility comfort, quality equipment)
Kim and Kim, 1995 QUESC	11	Employee attitude Employee reliability	Program offered	Ambience Information available Personal considerations Price Privilege Ease of mind Stimulation Convenience
Crompton, MacKay, and Fesenmaier, 1991	4	Assurance Rreliability Responsiveness		Tangibles
Chelladurai, Scott, and Haywood-Farmer, 1987 SAFS	5	Primary core: professional (e.g., knowledge and skill) Primary core: consumer	Primary core: professional (e.g., quality of programs)	Primary facilitating goods Secondary facilitating goods

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INSTRUMENTI ZA MJERENJE KVALITETE USLUGE KOD USLUGA VEZANIH UZ SPORTSKU I FIZIČKU AKTIVNOST

S A Ž E T A K

Istraživanja koja se bave mjerenjem kvalitete kod sportskih usluga provode se posljednja dva desetljeća. Cilj ove studije je istražiti kvalitetu kod sportskih usluga u smislu njihove klasifikacije na promatračke i participirajuće usluge te pružiti sažeti uvid u dosadašnja empirijska istraživanja te tematike. Ova studija pokazuje da je literature vezana uz sportske usluge još uvijek u povojima te da još nema jedinstvenih razvojnih modela. Također, ispitani istraživački modeli upućuju na zaključak da ne samo da sportske usluge imaju drugačija obilježja i dimenzije od ostalih usluga, već i da se one međusobno razlikuju. S obzirom na to, modeli koji će se stvarati u budućnosti morali bi se testirati na različitim skupinama.